

FUTURE ENROLLMENT & FACILITIES TASK FORCE MINUTES

Tuesday, June 23, 2009

Oliver Administration Building

Present

Subcommittee: Karen Lynch, Chair; John Bento and Denise Arsenault

School Committee: Paul Silva, Chair and John Saviano

Guests: Dr. Mara, Superintendent; Diane Mederos, Bristol Town Administrator; David E. Barbosa, member of the Bristol Town Council and member of the Regional Joint Finance Committee; Diane Williamson, and Community Development Director

Parent Representatives: Cheryl Burns, Melissa Labonte, Joe Ciullo, Rebecca Fikiet, Susan Rancourt, Kristen Quinn, Cara Cromwell, and Jennifer Barry

Chair, Karen Lynch called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM. Karen made brief introductions of subcommittee members, then asked guests and parent representatives to introduce themselves. A motion was made by Denise Arseneault to approve the minutes from the May 13th meeting. Motion was seconded by John Bento and passed unanimously.

Courses of action were reviewed and discussed by John Bento who authored these actions at the first meeting. The intent is to have committee members to get involved with a course of action of their interest. Members of each subgroup will take their course of action head on. If information is needed, a request of the Chair will be made and Karen will either obtain such information for members or point them in the proper direction whom to contact or where to go for such information. Course of Action #1 is pro-taxpayer, maximizing current school space. Karen noted that the issue regarding Bristol students being bused to Hugh Cole to fill available classrooms there can be revisited by the Warren Town Council. Members of the Warren Town Council agreed they went into it blindly, without having all the proper information and members have spoken to school committee members and are certainly willing to have further discussions concerning the issue to acquire more accurate information. The issue was blown out of proportion in the media and Warren council members agree they would never want to see Bristol students put into an environment which was not conducive to their education. John asked that members go through the courses of action and not to focus too much on what either town councils may be doing. He advised members that courses of action can be modified and revisited at any point.

Course of Action #2 – build another school. This is very anti-taxpayer. But John emphasized not to allow funding to be an

issue. Anyone with ideas should certainly bring them forward for the subgroup to consider and open up for discussion.

Developing affordable housing at the former American Tourister factory was brought up by Mr. Saviano. This future development could possibly mean 200-250 new students Warren. Karen asked Diane Williamson if she had any updated information regarding plans Roger Williams University may have for the Almeida Apartments. Diane stated that Roger Williams is not amenable to giving up units at the Almeida Apartments for affordable housing.

Course of Action #3 – the available use of empty buildings. John asked members who decide to join this CA think outside the box in terms of utilizing buildings in Bristol. Reynolds could potentially be reopened temporarily if a need arose. He advised members of this CA to brainstorm regarding the cost of reopening Reynolds in order to have it up to code to the level of Colt Andrews for the students. A very rough guesstimate to bring Reynolds up to code for use by the district is about \$150,000. The heating and electrical systems need work, as does the roof, and the repair of some windows. Although \$150,000 may be enough money to open the doors to Reynolds School, Karen noted that it would require a much larger financial investment to bring it up to the level of the Colt Andrews renovation.

Course of Action #4 – Open a charter/lab school. Collaborate with RWU in which they would provide teachers and funding; a program

which could better assist students. A location would be unknown and also a breakdown of resources would need to be provided by the district. These types of items would be investigated by subgroup members and presented at to the committee for discussion.

John reiterated the fact that members of subgroups would find themselves on a fact-finding mission with the charge of changing assumptions to fact, then presenting this information with the entire task force. Advantages and disadvantages of each course of action should be examined. Joe Ciullo asked what type of resources and research would be available while examining the courses of action. It was pointed out that funding has not been allocated by the district for research. However, as stated above, requests for information (RFI's) can be made of the task force chair; and she will take charge of finding what types of information is out there which can be obtained by subgroup members.

The charge of this task force is to look at all the options out there. Explore the facts, research, brainstorm until a suitable course of action is found. It will most likely be the one that rises to the top and keeping an open mind is key.

Once the full task force formulates and agrees to one course of action a presentation will then be made to the full school committee. Developing and implementing a timeline is key.

Dr. Mara then gave an update of current district enrollment. As indicated in the NESDEC report, the district's enrollment is in a leveling off period. There is one bubble at Rockwell which is a 3rd grade classroom and this bubble will continue to advance, next year to the 4th grade. This is not a full track at Rockwell, just one classroom. Again, based on the NESDEC report, the K enrollment is not as high due to the slowing down of the economy and slow population group. There continues to be room at Colt Andrews. Hugh Cole still has ample classroom space. Guiteras is pretty close to full capacity this year.

The study conducted by NESC which was commissioned by the school committee as warranted by the State. The information found in the report on current capacity and the potential use of all building space gives a good picture of where the task force can direct itself in the next five to ten years. Standard district classroom size is 24 students per classroom.

As a representative of the Joint Finance Committee, David Barbosa formally requested the task force supply the JFC with the cost of reopening Reynolds school. After an open discussion it was decided that the task force would not be able to provide adequate information to the JFC in such a short period of time and that each course of action needed several months, not to mention be examined in its own right before making such information public knowledge. Therefore, this information will not be supplied to the JFC at this time. Mr.

Barbosa reassured the members he will continue to attend task force meetings to stay informed on the issues and courses of action. Paul Silva noted that the request made by Mr. Babosa's on behalf of the Joint Finance Committee should be made to the full school committee, not the task force.

Karen reiterated that the best course of action has to be the one which is the best solution for the students of both communities. It may not be the one which is the least expensive, but the one which will offer the best educational environment for the children at the most affordable price.

Cara Cromwell asked for the option of course of action #5 – a “take no action” could also be put out there? It may be that the district never gets to the point that something needs to be done. Members agreed this could be a course of action; however, the task force needs to reasonably be prepared and to be in a position to educate the public should the district experience growth in the next five to ten years. What would the task force recommend? After its recommendation, the public would then decide how to move forward. Fortunately, there is the luxury of planning a course of action way ahead of the need rather than having to plan at the last minute.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:15 for a fifteen minute break. At 7:30, the meeting was recalled to order. A brief discussion was held as members decided which course of action group they would join.

There was not a desire for members to research CA#2 mostly due to the fact that it is very anti-taxpayer. However, a study conducted by the Mt. Vernon group a few years back is available to examine. It was suggested the study could be used as a catalyst to put together a brief course of action so when reporting to both the school committee and the public all avenues will have been explored. A plan of construction will include both a scenario of a donated piece of land and one with the purchase of land.

It was agreed the timeline for a recommendation and presentation to the full school committee will be planned for the third week in January, 2010. This gives the task force several months to work on their courses of action. The next time task force course of action subgroups meet each group will decided on a leader or coleaders. They will be the person(s) whom present to the full school committee. It was also decided that subgroups could meet at various locations as they explore their courses of action. However, subgroups will also share their requests for information and current updates with the whole task force at regularly scheduled meetings.

Members of the Task Force will reconvene again on Tuesday, July 28th, 6 PM at the Oliver Administration Building, 2nd floor conference room.

Adjournment

John Saviano made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Denise Arseneault. The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 PM.

/jt